

Driving in Winter Weather

News Release Date

02-20-2020

The following information is from the North Carolina Department of Transportation. Additional information may be found at <https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/safety/driving-safety/Pages/winter-weather.aspx>

Driving in Winter Weather

The N.C. Department of Transportation proactively plans for winter weather and has crews ready to clear roads, but driving during and after rain, ice or snow can still be dangerous.

Although the guidelines on this page can help prevent a wreck, the only way to be certain is to stay off the roads.

Before Driving

Be sure your vehicle is running well and equipped properly for driving on potentially dangerous roads.

You should have a supply kit that includes an ice scraper, snow brush, extra windshield wiper fluid and anti-freeze and a basic automotive tool kit that includes jumper cables and flares.

Put in supply kit in your trunk in case you get stranded. Include a flashlight, first-aid kit, blanket, shovel, sand (to give tires traction), non-perishable snacks and drinking water and safety flares. You might want to include other items based on your personal needs.

Be sure you have at least a half-tank of gas in your vehicle (short commutes can turn into long ones when a storm hits) and a full reservoir of windshield washer fluid.

Venturing Out

First, don't go out unless you absolutely have to. If you must:

Slow down and maintain a safe following distance between you and other vehicles. Pass with extreme caution. Excessive speed is the No. 1 cause of wrecks in winter weather.

Do not use cruise control.

Approach bridges and overpasses with extreme caution since they accumulate ice first. Do not apply your brakes while on a bridge.

Come to a complete stop or yield the right of way when approaching an intersection where traffic lights are out. Treat this scenario as a four-way stop.

Clear as much as possible snow and ice from your vehicle – from the windows, mirrors, roof, hood, trunk, bumper, headlights and tail lights – of snow and ice to keep it from blowing off and obscuring your view or hitting other drivers' vehicles.

Drive smoothly, without sudden accelerating, braking or turning.

Black Ice

Appearing as wet spots on a road, black ice is often the result of melting ice and snow that refreezes into thin layers.

Although NCDOT does its best to treat areas that are prone to black ice, it is unpredictable, and most of the time, drivers aren't aware of it until it's too late.

Don't drive unless you absolutely have to do so. The safest way to avoid black ice is to stay off the roads

If you do have to drive, do so at a slow speed and leave plenty of space between you and the vehicle in front of you.

If You Start to Slide

Don't panic.

Avoid using your brakes, if possible. If you have to, use them gently. (Apply gentle, steady pressure to anti-lock brakes. For standard, brakes that are not anti-lock, pump the brake pedal gently to avoid locking up).

Wait for your vehicle to slow down enough to regain traction before gently accelerating.

For rear-wheel skids, turn the steering wheel in the direction your rear wheels are headed. Instead of focusing on what your vehicle might be headed toward, focus on getting out of the skid.

For front-wheel skids, shift into neutral and don't try to steer immediately. When your vehicle begins to slow down, steer in the direction that you want your vehicle to go. Then, put the vehicle into gear and gently accelerate.

If you begin to slide, take your foot off the gas and turn the steering wheel in the direction of the slide. Applying the brakes will cause you to further lose control of your vehicle.

If You Get Stuck

Don't spin your wheels (doing so will only dig you in deeper). Instead, turn them from side to side to help clear snow, and then turn the steering wheel so the tires are as straight as possible.

Use a shovel to clear the snow in front of and behind your tires.

Spread cat litter, sand or salt in the cleared areas around your drive wheels.

Another strategy involves rocking the vehicle back and forth. (Check your owner's manual first; some vehicle transmissions might be damaged using this strategy.) Shift from forward to reverse and back again, using a light touch on the gas pedal. Resist the temptation to spin your wheels.